

The Broken Coin

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by
Grace Cunard

A Story of Mystery and Adventure

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SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principality of Gretzhoffen to pick out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

SECOND INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER VI.

Count Frederick.

Kitty Gray turned suddenly to the man seated beside her in the motor, bending upon him a steady gaze.

"Who are you?" asked she. "Why did you follow me?"

The swathed figure suddenly straightened. "Whatever I am—whatever you may think me, do not believe me incapable of gratitude to yourself."

"What is your name?"

"They call me Roleau, mademoiselle."

Kitty Gray turned yet more closely to him, gazed straight into his eyes.

"Then why not enlist with me? Surely we have a common cause. We have a common enemy. Would it be wrong did you and I league against him?"

"You ask me, then—"

"To be my friend, my ally."

"Surely I owe him no allegiance further!" exclaimed Roleau bitterly.

"He struck me like a dog."

"Yet you and I must see him again—and soon."

"What! Would you trust yourself once more in his presence? You are an American girl—you are innocent, you are ignorant. I warn you."

"None the less, if I am to go forward with the business which brought me here to Gretzhoffen, surely I must once more meet the Count Frederick."

The man at her side hesitated no more than an instant. "Very well," said he calmly. "As for me, my life has been forfeit many a time before now. What matter? I will go with you as you say. Indeed, I fancy I know why you ask me to go—they know me at the palace—they will admit us both."

It was as Roleau had said. When finally the two drew up to the court driveway in front of the count's palace, they were admitted without question. Roleau closed the door behind him and put a finger to his lips for silence.

"They will listen," he whispered. "Be careful. This is the room where Count Frederick receives his friends."

Curiously, silently, Kitty sat or at times walked about the room, taking stock of the surroundings. Count Frederick entered.

"Mademoiselle! I am charmed! So you remember me?"

"You may say as much indeed," rejoined Kitty Gray calmly. "I saw you in the carriage this morning."

He turned now to Roleau, with no change in his countenance to indicate any recollection of the nature of their last meeting. "You may retire to the next room," said he, dismissing him with a wave of the hand.

"Do not in the least misunderstand me, Monsieur le Comte," said she lightly. "My business is very simple. I have a proposition to make to you—a business proposition."

"But I am not a business man," mocked the smiling antagonist who faced her. He came yet a half step closer.

"Are you so sure?" exclaimed she suddenly. "Is there no business in which I am definitely concerned? Then why did you send a messenger to follow me in my own country, to ransack my apartments there, to violate my privacy even on the steamer?"

"My man served me but ill—if I may admit part of what you say mademoiselle."

"That is why I am here—and in his company! Yes, I know your messenger as I know you. Come, let us reason together over this, Monsieur le Comte. Shall it be business or war between us?"

The sheer audacity of this speech for one moment daunted Count Frederick. The next he broke into a roar of laughter and flung himself into a chair. "Admirable!" said he.

She started away from him, moving toward the door. "I came, Monsieur le Comte," said she boldly, "to ask you what price for the half coin which you seek to hold. Suppose, for instance, that Gretzhoffen loan were executed for you finally in New York—would that influence you at all? Come now, let us reason."

"I am beyond reason; I care little for the sordid side. I value not so much money as what money brings. It could bring me no more than what fortune has brought me at no cost, this morning—this very hour."

"Roleau!" cried Kitty suddenly. "A moi! Au secours! Vite!"

"You waste breath," laughed Count Frederick. "He cannot come."

Kitty made one swift dart toward the door. She was too late. The relentless face of her opponent smiled

at her, his strong fingers turned the key in the lock, removed it, thrust it into his pocket.

"Mademoiselle," he said calmly, "you say you came on business. Very well, let us talk business. We know something of the history of a certain broken coin. Very good. You have half of it. We will say I have the other. Give me your half the coin, and I will let you go. Refuse, and I'll never let you go."

"I will do nothing under compulsion from you or any other man," said Kitty Gray stoutly. "I offer you a fair price for your half of the coin."

"You will not give it to me?"

"No! No!"

A loud pounding on the door interrupted them at this moment. "It is Roleau," smiled the count. "I will have him whipped."

The face of Kitty Gray had grown like marble. Suddenly, with one swift movement, she dashed her clenched hand with all her force into the face which bent toward her. A livid mark arose under the swift compact. The next instant Kitty felt her wrist caught in an iron grasp. Struggling, she was forced backward. She felt another hand grasp her wrist.

The man Grahame, the count's valet, had appeared mysteriously from the alcove adjoining.

"Give me the coin!" insisted Count Frederick still. "Tell me where I may have it—or by the Lord! I will wait a long time to think this matter over."

"Excellency!" ejaculated the man Grahame suddenly. "On guard! He is breaking in the door. Quick, excellency!"

And even as Roleau, by a mighty heave burst in the door, Grahame and his master hurried Kitty to the rear door of the alcove. It made out upon a dimly lighted hall.

Roleau heard them pass, followed swiftly as he could. But it was empty. The purr of a motor getting under way reached his ears.

"So, then—we failed," said Roleau bitterly.

CHAPTER VII.

In the Desert.

Convinced against her will, as she hurried along in the grasp of the two powerful men, that compliance would serve her purpose better than resistance, Kitty Gray took her place on the seat of the motor car.

"More and more I admire you," said the man at her side, as the motor swung into its speed. "What a woman you are! If you would but give me time—"

"You shall have all the time you ask, Monsieur le Comte!"

"Still, I ponder as to your motive in all this. It cannot be money."

"Indeed it is money—in part."

"How much, mademoiselle?"

"A year's salary—I have got much at stake, on my word. Twelve hundred dollars, Monsieur le Comte. It is a fortune for me."

Count Frederick flung himself back upon the cushions and laughed long and loud. "Twelve hundred dollars!" said he. "Twelve hundred dollars in a whole year, in an entire year? My dear, give me the half coin you have upon you, and I promise you shall have twelve thousand dollars to spend as you like each and every day of your life, as long as you live. Come now, is it a trade? You said you came to talk business."

For the first time now Kitty looked about her, scarce having realized how long their journey had been. So great had been their speed that by this time they had cleared the city walls of Gretzhoffen and passed the tiled farmlands of the villages. It was what was known locally as the desert—a neutral ground, not tilled and incapable of successful tillage, which lay between the two kingdoms of Gretzhoffen on the east and Grahoffen on the west.

Whether it was the heat of the sun which had expanded the air in the motor tires, or whether there was some sharp stone under the wheel, there was no time to determine; yet suddenly, with the usual rifle-like report, there was an explosion of the tire. The car was practically helpless.

Kitty looked about her vaguely, fearfully, but as she bent from the open window she heard in the distance the chug of another motor, driven rapidly, thrown wide open and coming forward at great speed.

"Quick! Grahame," the count demanded. "This is your work. She has it on her person. You must—yes, you must take it at once."

As he laid hand upon her, all the hot indignation of Kitty's soul flamed up. She battled as best she might. She defeated the man in his purpose of snatching at the string which he saw suspended about her neck. His suspicions were well founded, for once more Kitty had concealed her portion of the coin in a little bag which she carried thus. Baffled, and knowing that he had small time to finish his work, Grahame at length raised a dastardly hand and struck the girl in the

face. She fell, stunned, at his feet.

"You ruffian, what have you done!" exclaimed his master, as with a thin smile Grahame held up the chamois bag.

But Count Frederick ripped it open, took from it what he saw, and thrust it into his pocket. Even as this happened, the pursuing car was closing in upon them. It was Roleau who sprang from the seat and hastened forward, revolver in hand. As he did so a weapon cracked from the car of Count Frederick, and Roleau, stumbling, fell forward and lay still.

"Come Grahame—quick." An instant later they had taken possession of the motor impressed by Roleau.

How long she remained senseless, she herself scarcely knew, but when Kitty stirred, raised her head, she saw lying close beside her the figure of the man who had sought to befriend her.

Kitty suddenly raised her hand to her neck. The cord was gone. The packet was missing.

When after a time she ceased in a useless effort to lug the heavy body of Roleau into the shelter of the car, she turned to gaze about her. She paused, her gaze arrested. Yes, a little caravan, apparently from some far off land, and journeying hither frankly enough across the neutral ground between these two little kingdoms.

The apparent leader of this little caravan was a reticent, dark-bearded man. He advanced now quietly toward the young woman.

"The lady is in distress? There has been trouble here—robbers, bandits—your man has been killed, perhaps. Yes, there are many such in this land, between the two kingdoms. There is no law here, mademoiselle. I cross as you see, with my own men armed. I am, if you please, a merchant of Grahoffen. Sometimes I do a little merchandising between the two kingdoms."

He pointed to the coat of arms on the door of the disabled car. "The Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen has been here."

"Aye, the Count Frederick! It was he who left us here."

He made a gesture now to his attendants, and as some of them lifted the limp form of Roleau, he himself assisted Kitty to mount. A few moments later and the strange procession was again on its way.

"Mademoiselle," said the leader at length, as he drew up alongside, "I must continue on into my own country. We are near the edge of it here. At the little stream which lies just beyond there is a house of a peasant—it is but a hovel and no fit place for you, that is true. But even so, that is better either for you or for your man."

They advanced now a little distance farther, until within full sight of the peasant's little hut, Radoz made signs

of dismissal.

It was not long before they arrived at the hunting lodge.

Count Sachio introduced his guests with a few words in his own language. They stared politely, smiled discreetly, but made Kitty welcome.

"Now, be off with you all!" exclaimed Count Sachio. "To the woodland paths, since the morning is so fresh."

"Mademoiselle, you will have refreshments?" he asked, as laughing gaily, the others dispersed.

"Nothing more for me than a cup of tea," said Kitty gravely. "Least you think me rude—perhaps it may be well for me to excuse myself. Is there any way in which I may get back to the cottage where I left my man?"

"Not so fast, not so fast as all that, ma cherie! You have not tested out my humble place as well as I would ask. Come, what do you think of it?"

Not his words so much as his manner sent swift alarm into Kitty Gray's heart. Swiftly she arose and made back as he, warned somewhat by his wine, now advanced toward her, smiling. Her gesture angered him and he stepped forward, but more swiftly.

At once Kitty gave voice to a loud cry of terror—the appeal for help—a woman's first weapon of defense. For even as she did so, she heard the sound of hoofs on the trail beyond the edge of the forest.

"Roleau!" She cried aloud, "A moi!"

Kitty guessed, rather than knew, that Roleau's uneasiness on her account had led him to pursue her. Such, indeed, was the case.

"Who are you, man?" demanded Count Sachio, imperiously. "I am Sachio of Grahoffen, man—one who need not declare himself to you. Your life shall pay for this!"

"Good! Why not now, my friend?" retorted Roleau calmly. "I have seen men of many sorts before now, but none that I feared. This lady is in my care. She will ride with me, and we will ride better horses than that on which I came."

Even as he spoke he passed rapidly among the spirited mounts of the little party lately arrived. Two he selected for himself and Kitty. With the others he was busy with a few strokes of the short knife he wore. He grinned as he came out from among the horses.

"So, Monsieur Sachio of Grahoffen," said he, "you will ride with short girths if you follow us." In truth he had cut a piece out of the girth of each one of the unused horses.

An instant later he and Kitty were mounted and speeding away.

CHAPTER IX.
King Michael II.
When Count Frederick and his accomplice Grahame left their two vic-

etudes in the islands are carnivals and head-hunters. They still believe that it is necessary to eat some important personage in order to gain strength and power.

When two tribes fight, the chief plan of campaign is to kill the enemy's chief, and when he is slain the custom is for the victors to make a meal of him. By eating so powerful a man they think they will gain power themselves. It is this belief which makes the position of the white man among the Melanesian natives one of



"This Lady Is in My Care."

hunt. The apparent leader of the party, a stalwart, sturdy man, dark of hair and richly clad—rode slightly in advance of the others.

Catching sight of a young woman—and a very pretty one—standing thus alone on the forest road, this gentleman pulled up suddenly. "Bonjour, monsieur," said Kitty, with her usual recourse to the French language.

"Eh bien, c'est que vous parlez français!" And at once he himself broke into voluble French, much to Kitty's delight.

"I am an American," she went on to say.

"I ask pardon, mademoiselle," rejoined the dark man—whose bold eyes, after what seemed to Kitty to be the fashion of the country, now were carefully estimating her, line by line—"I beg your pardon, but mademoiselle is alone? Why?"

"My companion is ill yonder at the peasant's house. There was an accident yesterday with our motor—he is not yet able to travel."

"I am riding but now to my own hunting lodge, a few miles yonder at the edge of the forest; why not come with me so that we might speak over this matter? I am entertaining friends there—a little house party—there are other ladies. You will be made welcome. If you can ride—"

"Oh, yes," said Kitty. "I can manage."

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etudes lying helpless in the sandy plain, they themselves made all speed possible back to the capital. In spite of his regret at violence to a woman, exultation sat on the dark features of Count Frederick.

"Now, Grahame," he exclaimed, "at last we have it."

"Excellency," rejoined the other, "you have but half the coin. I told you where the two pieces were—where each was. One you have at last, and after some trouble. But the other is still in the possession of Michael the king. He may not yield it easily."

"With ease or difficulty, he shall give it up," growled Count Frederick. "We will take it from him if need be."

And straightway to the Royal palace of Gretzhoffen they fared on, fast as might be. There was no difficulty in securing admission, for Count Frederick was well known at the palace, almost as the king himself.

King Michael II looked with a certain disapproval upon Count Frederick's dusty clothes.

"I ask your majesty's pardon, but I have had no time to arrange myself in proper courtesy. My errand is urgent. But I fancy you cannot guess it?"

"Not in the least. It could not be that you wish to ask me again what you asked me the last time you came here—about the broken coin?"

"Yes, it was precisely that."

"Why, then?"

"Your majesty has promised me some little thing in reward for a certain service which I was able to render not long ago. It was rude of me to remind of that—but suddenly there came up a need for some little trinket—some jewel—some oddity. Your majesty, I wish it for a lady, and my jeweler told me he could make of this broken coin—"

"There is a woman in it?"

The puffy eyes of the king showed interest now.

"To be sure—there is always a woman."

"Why not then a pearl, a sapphire, a diamond perhaps? Take as you like." He waved an indifferent, pudgy hand toward a cabinet. "Michael the Second keeps all his promises."

"But why not the coin, your majesty?"

"You persist? So do I. I suggest that for a lady—and you say there is a lady—you make some gift more fitting. I have explained to you that the coin is not presently at hand. But as I said, help yourself to something that is better."

Count Frederick was a man of wit quick enough to see that there was no time to force an argument. Defeated once more, he even accepted his defeat. He stepped now to the little drawer which the king pulled open for him, and selected a very modest little ring, which carelessly he dropped into his own pocket.

CHAPTER X.

Greek Meets Greek.

Arrived at his own home, Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen found a little pile of unopened letters waiting for him, and picked up one bearing the crest of Count Sachio of Grahoffen, a man he had known for many years and with whom, if truth be told, he had had certain plans which neither would have cared to have come into public knowledge. He tore open the envelope.

"So, Sachio asks me to join him at a little hunting party at his lodge in the forest beyond the neutral ground! I believe I'll go. After all, it might not be a bad thing to find out a little more about the condition of those two we left yonder in the desert. Yes, I'll ride back the very way I just came."

Mile after mile slipped ribbon-like beneath their speeding wheels. Soon they had left behind them almost all sights of the green commons and the fenced fields which lay under the walls of Gretzhoffen town. It was Grahame who first detected, far ahead, a little dust cloud of advancing travelers. He called the attention of his master.

"Glasses, Grahame—find what it is." Even the stolid Grahame gave a

sharp exclamation. "Here come two riding, a man and a woman. I swear, I believe it is the two, both come to life again!"

They advanced now more slowly and pulled up at the foot of a little ravine, where a cross trail came in from the right, leading no one knew where, out into No Man's Land between the two kingdoms of Gretzhoffen and Grahoffen. Here the depression concealed them and they awaited the arrival of the two travelers.

That came in due course, but with it almost synchronously yet other events. A sound of shouting became audible. To the right, along a curving cross-road of the desert, there came into view, riding at top speed, whooping aloud as they spurred forward, a ragged band of drunken ruffians—none less than a party of the banditti which in those somewhat lawless days infested this open and little-traveled region, a sort of No Man's Land.

"Come, your money—your valuables!" exclaimed the leader of these ruffians. "You know me? I am Landozi, chief of the Brotherhood. My men like work none too well, and we must eat and drink. Your money, please—or we will take it whether or not you please."

Contemptuously, Count Frederick reached into his pockets and flung upon the ground before them such valuables as he had.

The bandit now turned to repeat this process with the other two strangers, whom they could not classify as friends or foes of those whom they had now found in the motor car.

"What have we here—a woman, and a beautiful one!" exclaimed the bandit chief. "She wears no jewels—perhaps she has not much money for us. But still, there are other ways. What say you, my fellows, shall we hold her for a ransom?"

The man Roleau here raised his hand and spoke with authority.

"My friends," he said, "what I have is little and it is yours, for you are my brothers and I know you must live as well as I. I know you are friends of the king's troops—shortly we will ride thither together, if you don't mind. As for this lady, lay no hand on her. I tell you she is a highness of a foreign land, none less than America across the sea."

"And why not fit for ransom then?" demanded the bandit chief.

"Because, I tell you she is one of the ladies of the king's household—she is protected by King Michael II himself, no less. She is of his rank in life, I tell you, my brothers."

Irresolute the bandit turned toward his men, but a murmur of assent rattled what Roleau had said.

"Good!" said he suddenly. "I know you well, Roleau. The lady is safe with us. We will do more—we will accompany you to the walls of the city itself, so that you may be safe from any of our brotherhood."

Under the walls of Gretzhoffen itself they met a troop of the king's horse, riding out for practice. Their officer was not unknown to Count Frederick—and for that matter, the leader of the banditti, Landozi himself, seemed not unknown. Loitering along, they rode now up to the city's gates.

Yet another event transpired before the two parties separated near the city's gate. An additional party of horsemen, riding hard from the desert, appeared—none less than Count Sachio, a friend or two and a small group of retainers!

"Sachio!" exclaimed Count Frederick. "My friend, you come but just in time."

"I may well believe it," said Sachio dryly, gazing at the assemblage about

the city's gate. An additional party of horsemen, riding hard from the desert, appeared—none less than Count Sachio, a friend or two and a small group of retainers!

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"CASCARETS" ACT ON LIVER, BOWELS

No sick headache, biliousness, bad taste or constipation by morning.

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